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Dragoons Help Afghan Air Force

Zabul, Afghanistan- After some intensive training in air mobility operations from their Air Force counterparts, Dragoons from FIRES Squadron of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment had the chance to show what they had learned Thursday, Aug. 26 during a joint air drop exercise with the Afghan National Air Force.

The purpose of the operation was to establish a landing strip and drop zone near Qalat that would allow supplies and equipment to be flown into the area to support the troops on the ground. The permanent strip will also provide for easier troop movement into and out of theater.

“We are trying to make this area into a more permanent air field,” said Sergeant 1st. Class. Ricardo Morales, Noncommissioned Officer in charge of the landing zone, “where troops and logistical support can be flown directly into the battlefield.”

“This will be a trial run using a C27A cargo plane piloted by members of the Afghan National Air Force,” Morales explained. “The crew will land the plane then take-off again and do a series of air-drops over the landing zone.”

Morales describe what makes this event a significant moment.

“This is a first for the Regiment to set something like this up,” Morales said. “It is also going to be a very vital part of logistical support for future Soldiers coming in.”

The operation began well before the aircraft arrived. Morales and his crew of both Air Force and 2SCR Soldiers started preparing the runway hours before the scheduled touchdown.

The team starts by clearing a flat plot of land approximately 1,300 meters long to serve as the landing strip. The team then slowly walks the stretch of land clearing the area of any large rocks or debris that may cause damage to the plane or hinder its landing in anyway. Every 500 meters the team places VS-17 signal panels parallel to each other on the outside edges of the runway. The panels are bright pink in color and are used as markers to tell pilots where the runway edges are. The teams placed two sets of panels along the runway then a third orange VS-17 was placed 300 meters from the end.

Once the panels are in place the team proceeds to take wind velocity and direction readings. Morales and his team underwent an intensive two day training course in order to execute these operations.

“We covered all the aspects of how to set up a landing zone and drop zone,” Morales explained.

The team was supervised during the operation by the Air Mobility Liaison Officer, Lt. Col. Stacy Maxey, who was quite pleased with his students’ performance.

“It has been really good training all the way around,” Maxey said. “It’s been a real pleasure to work with Soldiers from 2SCR.”

Maxey stressed the importance of these types of operations to the overall mission in Afghanistan.

“These are the kind of operations that are allowing the war fighter to conduct combat sustainment and support operations in a wide variety of environments,” he said. “From this environment to a winter environment, it is these capabilities that give our war fighters the edge they need when times are tough.”

At the end of the day the mission was declared a success, with two smooth landings and four cargo drops. This capability will allow the Afghan National Security Forces and their Coalition Allies better access to needed logistical support.



Getting Ready: Sgt. 1st.Class Duvon Grady (left) and Sgt. 1st. Class Ricardo Morales secure a VS-17 panel to stakes at the edge of the new runway. These panels help the pilots determine when to begin breaking procedures.



Mission Accomplished: A C27A cargo plane from the Afghan National Air Force makes a successful drop during a practice mission.



Double Check: Air Mobility Liaison Officer, Air Force Lieutenant Col. Stacy Massey, left teaches Sgt. 1st. Class Ricardo Morales how to check for wind velocity.